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ABSTRACT

Recognizing the integral relationship of language and culture, this article outlines a guide for teachers of Indonesian who wish to supplement their language instruction with cultural concepts. Remarks and linguistic examples are presented for three language learning levels. An appendix contains an outline of the suggested scope and sequence of the cultural segment in Indonesian language teaching at college levels 1, 2, and 3. (RL)

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Integrating Culture in Indonesian Language Teaching: An Inevitability, But How Much?

While the culture and the language of a people may be studied by persons with no ability to communicate in the speech of that people, the language in question remains a lifeless and practically meaningless code until it is understood and appreciated as the manifestation of a particular culture.

In once discussing 'culture' with Takdir Alisjahbana, he conceived it as that which has remained when everything else has been lost from the mind. He understood the culture of the individual to be that hard-to-define yet unique element which makes for the 'cultivated man.'[1] This suggests that the ultimate aim in foreign language teaching is the transmittal to the student of the target country's conception of the 'cultivated man.' If this is so, the foreign language teacher must - paradoxically - actively teach those elements which the 'cultivated man' has forgotten, i.e. elements which for him (the 'cultivated man') exist at the subconscious level.

Moreover, defining 'the cultivated man' is an exercise loaded with impeding questions. Which man? From which part of the country? Of which period? And is not the 'cultivated man' in part born and not made? In view of these obstacles, would it not be absurd to expect the student to be capable of comprehending such a concept?

Nonetheless, it cannot be argued that culture remains the link between human beings; it is a means of interacting with one

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another. Moreover, culture is communication simultaneously carried on at many levels - conscious and unconscious, informal and formal, technical and non-technical. It includes the ways and attitudes of a people as well as their geography, history, social structure, art, and literature.[2] As for literature, it does not exist apart from language, notwithstanding its separate listing in a school curriculum. Structure and vocabulary are the building blocks of any piece of writing. Even the sounds of a language persist as internal vocalizing when the student is reading to himself, for the choice of sounds is a feature of the author's artistry and the reader's appreciation.

Inasmuch as language and literature do not exist independently of one another, so do language and culture. How, for instance, does one explain to an American the meanings of the Indonesian words 'warung' or 'kampung' without portraying the society they fit into?[3] And how to clarify to an Indonesian the connotations carried with American terms, such as 'credit card' or 'bussing,' without describing the circumstances and conditions through which these expressions have come about? Teaching word order according to grammatical patterns does not guarantee communication, as the foreign interlocutor may understand something quite different from what was intended to be conveyed.

The foregoing will have suggested that the teaching of culture is an integral part of language teaching. This being so, it would be useful for the foreign language instructor to have access to a series on contrastive cultural studies similar to the series on the history and the structure of languages published by the

University of Chicago Press.[4] But until such research is available, where should the teacher begin, and what will be the scope and sequence of the cultural segment in Indonesian language teaching? Following is a description of contents which this segment could contain per college level, i.e. at Levels I, II, and III, respectively.

Level I: The primary goals at this level are the mastery of the Indonesian sound system and basic structural patterns of the language, as well as the acquisition of a limited standard vocabulary. The cultural content at the early stages of this level is incidental to the language itself; it is manifested in idioms, vocabulary, structures, and the contents of dialogues. For example, the 'Saudara-Bapak' distinction is taught and reinforced by requiring the class to use the first form of address with one another and the second one with the teacher.[5] Different levels of speech ranging from, for instance, 'sampai bertemu lagi' to 'mari' (both expressions meaning 'until we meet again') are discussed very early. Vocabulary with special connotations is commented upon as it is introduced, e.g. 'selamat sore' ('good afternoon'), 'bapak guru' ('the (male) teacher')), 'seadanya saja' ('whatever there is').

Ideally, the dialogue provides an opportunity for teaching structures as well as cultural features. Cultural contrasts between Indonesia and America are highlighted through the use of conversations involving, whenever possible, students of the two countries. Cultural content not only interests the student; it also serves to make the presentation of structures less tedious.

The student need not only memorize the dialogue, but must also answer questions designed to point out the cultural features therein. Admittedly, the contents of dialogues may vary from text to text. It is believed, however, that students react most favorably to conversations dealing with the family, social life, and education.

Dialogues may also be used as reading passages. As such, they can at a later point be supplemented by short stories which, in turn, may be accompanied by a series of slides which would make these stories excellent for purposes of cultural awareness. The reading materials are, in addition, to be discussed in class with questions geared to the significance of new cultural features therein.

The incidental cultural element of the language itself plus culturally oreinted dialogues and reading passages thus permit an introduction to Indonesian culture at Level I.

Level II: The primary goals at this level are a review and an expansion of basic structures and vocabulary, as well as a reinforcement of language skills, with a greater emphasis on reading. In consequence, there will be opportunities for a greater exposure to Indonesian culture. The emphasis on reading is both intensive and extensive: intensive, in that the student must comprehend the required materials in detail; extensive, by making available copies of leading Indonesian periodicals and by asking students to make occasional comments on such readings in class.

The program at this level will, furthermore, include a grammar review which will contain occasional reading selections of a cultural nature. These lessons are to provide practical information

concerning such activities as eating at a restaurant or what people do in the afternoon hours.[6]

Extra-curricular activities which foster a continuing interest in Indonesian culture are also recommended. Similarly so, courses in other departments which deal with Indonesian civilization or are pertinent to it, and which could be taken as electives. The Indonesian language offerings are thereby complemented and fitted into a broader cultural spectrum. Students may even be suggested to study about Indonesia in an interdisciplinary fashion by combining the language with, for example, the art, the music, the theatre, and the history of the country.

Level III: This level is more directly culturally oriented than the first two stages. The proposal initiated by Ohio University to establish an Indonesian Language Center in Indonesia is, in fact, an attempt to give cultural meaning in depth to the study of the Indonesian language.[7] A few suggestions may here be made relevant to certain points brought up in Ohio University's design.

A civilization course could be added to the proposed curriculum whereby emphasis be given on contemporary Indonesian civilization by means of comparing Indonesian and American cultural patterns. An extensive slide collection to be used as reference material will complement texts by providing information on artistic, architectural, and historical foundations.

Secondly, a phonetics course may be offered which will combine phonetical exercises with selected elements of contemporary Indonesian culture. Students are required to present oral resumés of passages and to discuss the contents thereof. At the same time, different levels of speech are to be observed - from the language

employed by Radio Republik Indonesia (the radio station of the Indonesian government) to local slang.

Thirdly, the addition of a composition course will serve to reinforce the student's previous two years of structural learning through complete analyses of underlying differences between Indonesian and American expressions. To take an example: whereas an American normally says, 'she's boiling the water,' an Indonesian would focus on the object rather than the agent and says, 'airnya dipanasinya' ('air': 'water'). Such explanations of structure in terms of thought processes are essential if the student is expected to speak and write using truly Indonesian expressions. Written as well as oral compositions will be assigned on topics of a cultural nature taken from current newspapers and magazines.

Lastly, in the afore-mentioned courses students will be tested to varying degrees on the comprehension of the cultural features discussed.

In summary, at both Level I and Level II the sounds of Indonesian and structural patterns of the language receive primary emphasis. It is believed that the acquisition of the basic language skills is not only a linguistic, but also an important cultural goal. Cultural contents incidental to the language itself are explained. They will be expanded at Level II through a greater emphasis on reading. At Level III, a specific course is devoted to contemporary civilization whereby Indonesian and American cultural patterns are simultaneously discussed. In other courses at this level, the choice of texts will permit the teacher to achieve the specific goals of each course and to continue, at the same time,

exposing the student to cultural contents.

A general suggestion may here be added: the attitude of the teacher toward Indonesian culture is of great importance; cultural differences between Indonesia and America should be presented without attaching value judgments to these differences.

Attached Appendix is a follow-up of the foregoing discussion. It includes a more concrete presentation of the suggested scope and sequence of the cultural segment in Indonesian language teaching.

Appendix

Suggested Scope and Sequence of the Cultural Segment in Indonesian Language Teaching at College Levels I, II, and III

A. Level I.

Basic premise:

Instruction in the appreciation of Indonesian culture is an integral part of the regular-class and extra-curricular activities.

Desired student performance at the completion of this level:

1. Show an awareness of the social conventions which regulate the what and how of communication in Indonesian culture.

2. Have an initial acquaintance with the manners, foods, clothing, customs, and family life unique to Indonesia, as derived from the text, audio-visual aids, and outside readings in English.

3. Reflect attitudes which show understanding and respect for a society uniquely different, and yet similar, to his own.

4. Demonstrate as a result of class discussions and extra-curricular activities an introductory knowledge of the music, dance, art, geography, and history of Indonesia.

B. Level II.

Basic premises:

1. A firsthand knowledge of brief examples of Indonesian cultural and contemporary writing is an integral part of the reading at this level.

2. An awareness in written and oral work of the similarities and differences of Indonesian and American cultures, and

the continued development of empathy with the value systems of the Indonesian society are major goals at this level.

Desired student performance at the completion of this level:

1. Demonstrate empathy with the Indonesian value systems.

2. Show in classroom discussions and extra-curricular activities how these values affect family life, society, economy, politics, etc.

3. Demonstrate the ability to react to common situations, such as greetings, compliments, condolences, etc.

4. Express an awareness in written and oral work of the similarities and differences of Indonesian and American cultures as these patterns are made evident in audio-visual aids, and in presentations by both Indonesian visitors and Americans who have lived in Indonesia.

5. Attend, whenever possible, Indonesian films, lectures, concerts and art exhibits in order to appreciate the artistic and academic accomplishments of Indonesians.

C. Level III.

Basic premises:

1. Opportunities to expand individual interests are numerous in the developmental reading and individual study, which are important components of the program at this level.

2. Discussion of cultural items are all in the target language. Empathy for the way of life of the Indonesian people and enthusiasm for diversity as it is encountered are important.

Desired student performance at the completion of this level:

1. Be cognizant of the varieties of ways in which the main themes of Indonesian culture are reflected in everyday cultural patterns.

2. Show an awareness of how age, social class, and area of residence affect language use.

3. Demonstrate the ability to evaluate the authenticity of statements made regarding Indonesian culture.

4. Develop through reading selections that provide insights into the social structure of Indonesia a background sufficient to facilitate subsequent reading in the field of specialization of each individual student.

5. Exhibit the ability to speak intelligently and correctly, expressing empathy for the social customs of the Indonesian people, and knowledge of the geography and history of their land, of selected literature, and of the role of religious and political groups, ethnic minorities, and education in the social life of the country.

6. Relate Indonesian culture, in oral and written work, to American society and to other disciplines, especially the humanities.

7. Sense and begin to appreciate the contributions of the Indonesian people in art, music, theatre, and literature.

8. Have a legitimate concern for the popular culture of the Indonesian people as expressed in movies, art, music, dance, sports and recreation, and journalism.

9. Be able, in the final analysis, to share the Indonesian way of life as an active participant of the Indonesian community.

Footnotes

1. S. Takdir Alisjahbana is a recognized Indonesian writer and philologist, and the author of numerous publications. The discussion dates back to the fall of 1963 when he was a senior research fellow at the East-West Center, University of Hawaii.

2. See Edward T. Hall, The Silent Language (New York: Doubleday, 1959), pp. 87-112, 213.

3. The 'warung' is an eating place for the Indonesian common man. A 'kampung' is a hamlet-like area of residence either in the city or in the countryside.

4. History and Structure of Languages Series. Chicago, Illinois: The Universit of Chicago Press.

5. 'Saudara' is a form of address employed by the speaker when addressing someone of equal status. 'Bapak' is used when speaking to a person of higher status. Status here is determined by age and/or position. Both forms of address apply to males only.

6. See, for example, Sarumpaet, J. P., and Hendrata, H., A Modern Reader in Bahasa Indonesia. Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 1970.

7. The design originated from The Office of International Studies and The Southeast Asia Program, Ohio University. The proposed curriculum requires of students a successful completion of Second-Level Indonesian in order to be eligible for admission.